Women with Disabilities in Nova Scotia: A Statistical Profile

April, 2006

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Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, April 2006

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About the Council...

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established by provincial statute in 1977. The Council's mandate under the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia.

The Council's work touches on all areas of women's lives, including...

- ♀ family life
- ♀ economics
- ♀ legal rights
- ♀ sexuality
- ♀ health
- ♀ education
- ♀ paid and unpaid work
- ♀ violence

Council pays close attention to the experiences of women who face barriers to full equality because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, ableness, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

We are committed to voicing women's concerns to government and the community through policy research, information services and community liaison. Working cooperatively with women and equality-seeking organizations, our mission is to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Nova Scotia has the highest proportion of persons living with a disability among all the provinces with one in five women and men over the age of 15 reporting some type of disability or chronic health condition in 2001. As the overall disability rate increases substantially with age, and, as the majority of seniors (especially older seniors) are women, older women are disproportionately affected by disability.

The socio-economic situations of women and men with disabilities are quite different than those of women and men who do not have disabilities. The failure of society to include and support women with disabilities is illustrated in this statistical profile. As a group, women with disabilities have lower educational attainment, they are significantly less likely to be in the paid labour force, and they are more likely to be poor and to experience food insecurity than women without disabilities. Women with disabilities rate their health more poorly than women without disabilities. They also feel more vulnerable with respect to their personal safety and security as compared to women without disabilities, and with good reason, given their higher vulnerability to violence and abuse as evidenced by research.

While the socio-economic differences between persons with and without disabilities are significant, so too are those between women and men:

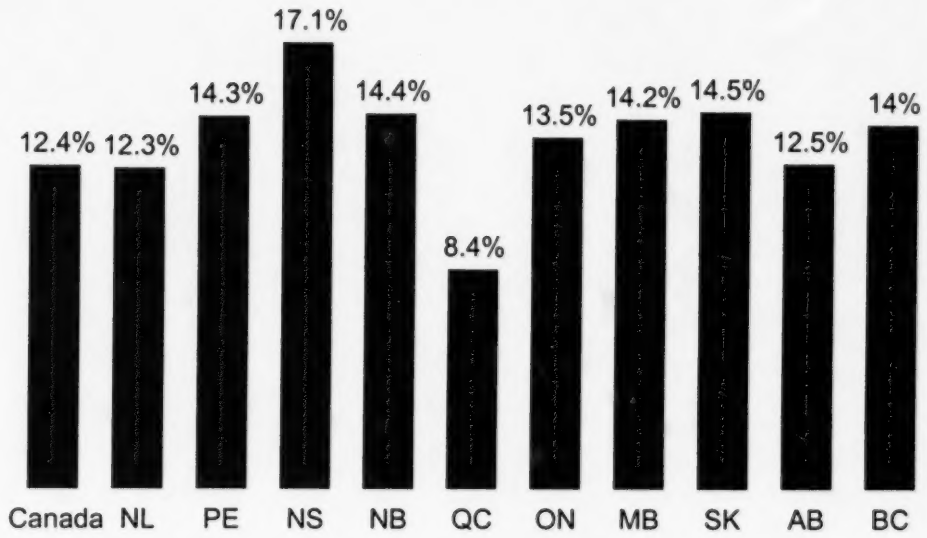
- Women are much more likely to be widowed than men and they are much more likely to live alone.
- People who live alone have less economic security than those who live in families and this is particularly evident for older women.
- Women are more likely than men to have care-giving and unpaid work responsibilities across their life-span and these responsibilities have considerable consequences for women's economic security, before and after retirement.

It is the intersections between disability and gender that result in the heightened social and economic vulnerability of women with disabilities. The cumulative effect of inequalities that are evident over the entire course of women's lives (eg., those related to child-raising, care-giving, labour force, wages and income security systems), is considerable and is heightened substantially by disability status.

Prevalence of Disability

According to the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), one of every six Nova Scotians reported having some kind of disability in 2001[1]. PALS defines persons with disabilities as those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical, mental condition, or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do. This gives Nova Scotia the highest proportion of persons with disabilities among all the provinces.

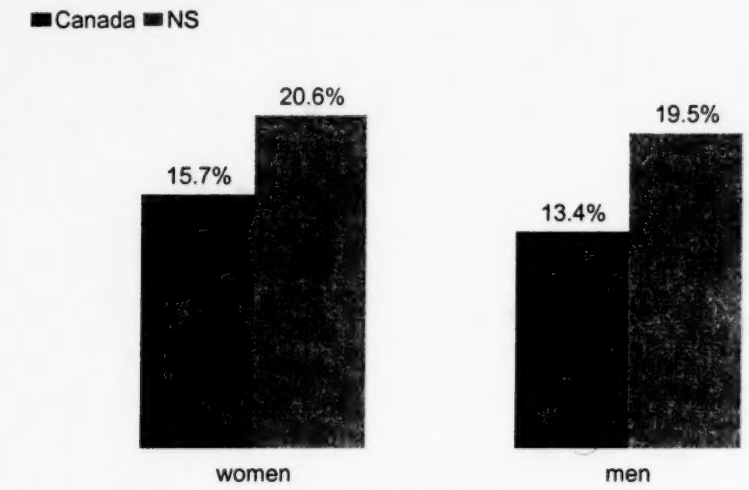
Percent of Population with Disabilities by Province, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-577-XIE

According to data from the 2001 Census, there appear to be regional variations in the prevalence of disability in Nova Scotia, with the lowest rates being in the Halifax region and the highest being in the Cape Breton region[2]. Part of the reason for these variations may be explained by age differences in the regions. The Halifax region, for example, has a lower proportion of persons aged 65+ than the rest of the province. Since rates of disability increase with age, it follows that the rate of disability in the Halifax region is lower. See Table 1 in Appendix A for more detailed information about regional rates of disability.

Adult Disability Rates (15 years and over) and Gender
Canada and Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-579

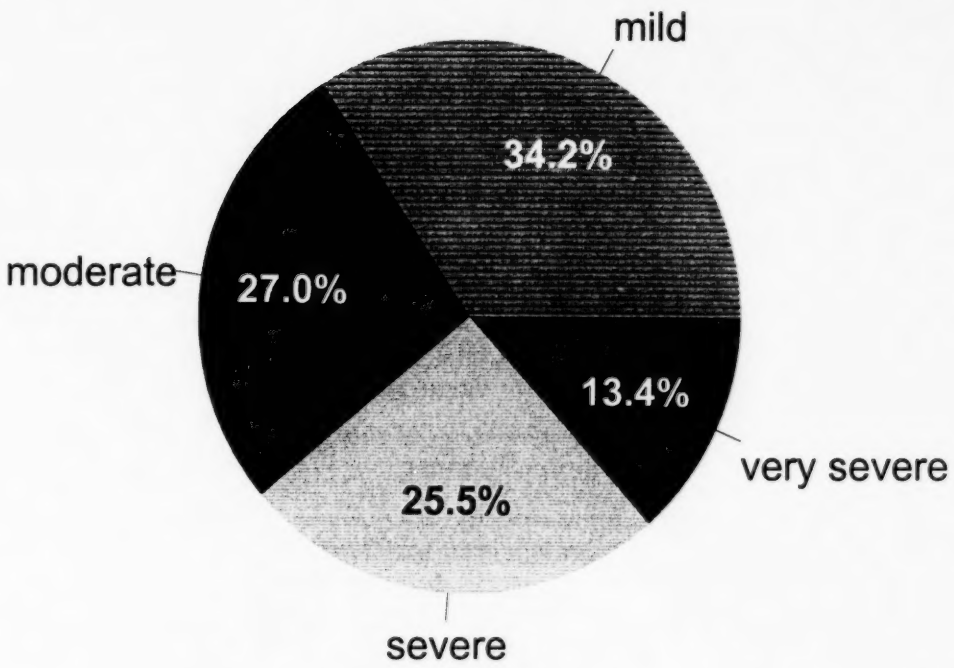
Among the Nova Scotian population aged 15 and over, one in five women and men report some level of disability, with a slightly greater proportion of women (20.6%) reporting a disability than men (19.5%). These rates are higher than the national rates for women and men which are 15.7% and 13.4%, respectively.

While women in the population aged 15 and over are slightly more likely than men to have a disability, the inverse is found in children under the age of 15 years. In Nova Scotia, 4.8% of boys aged 0-14 have some form of activity limitation compared to only 2.8% of girls the same age.

The overall disability rate increases substantially with age. Only 5% of Nova Scotian women and men aged 15-25 report a disability while 61% of both men and women who are aged 75 and over report some level of disability.

Severity of Disability

Severity of Disability
Women with Disabilities, Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 89-579

Close to 40% of women with disabilities in Nova Scotia report having a severe or very severe disability while 27% report having a moderate disability and 34% report a mild disability[3]. Severity of disability increases slightly with age.

Type of Disability by Gender

Mobility problems and activity limitations related to pain and discomfort are, by far, the types of disabilities reported most often by people aged 15 and over. Fifteen percent of all Nova Scotians aged 15 and over report having mobility problems and 14% report having activity limitations related to pain or discomfort.

There are some variations in the types of disabilities Canadian women and men report. Women make up the majority of those reporting visual disabilities, mobility disabilities, agility disabilities, pain disabilities and psychological disabilities. Men, on the other hand, make up the majority of those reporting hearing disabilities and learning disabilities. Activity limitations related to pain or discomfort are most prevalent among the working-age population, particularly working-age women. Mobility and memory problems are particularly prevalent among those aged 65 and over, with more women reporting mobility problems and more men reporting memory problems.

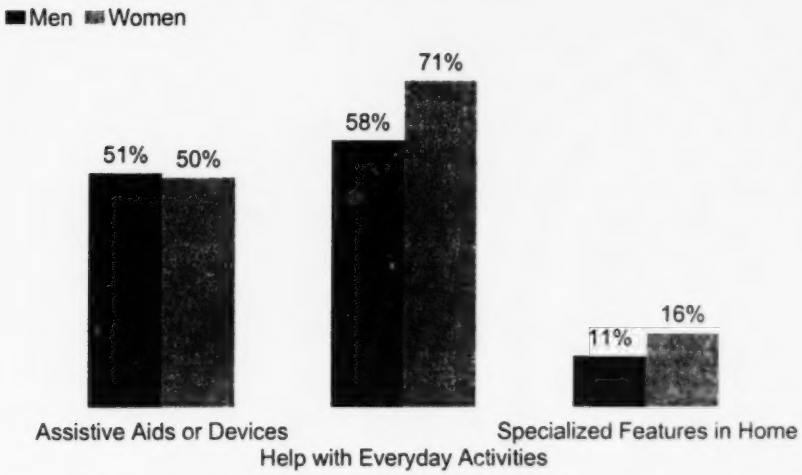
Type of Disability by Gender
Canada, 2001

	Females	Males
Seeing	62%	38%
Mobility	60%	40%
Agility	58%	42%
Pain	58%	42%
Psychological	57%	43%
Hearing	45%	55%
Learning	45%	55%

Source: Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 89-577-XIE

Disability Supports

Use of Assistive Aids or Devices, Help with Everyday Activities and Specialized Features in Home by Gender Persons with Disabilities, Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-581-XIE

Women and men with disabilities are about equally likely to use assistive devices or aids.[4] However, women with disabilities are substantially more likely than men with disabilities to require help with everyday activities.[5] Women are also slightly more likely to have specialized features in their homes than men.[6]

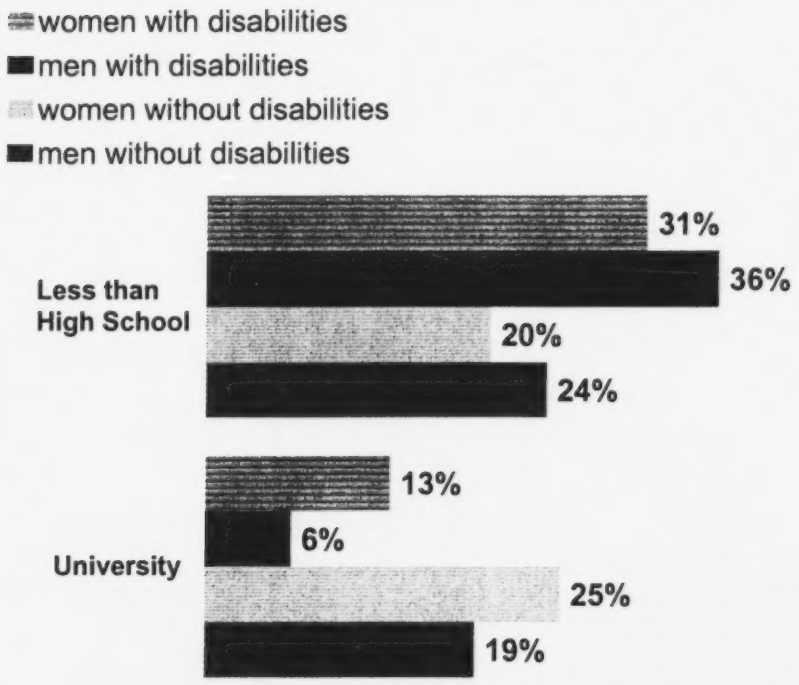
Transportation Issues

Information obtained from the 2001 PALS indicates that local and long-distance travel is a problem for many persons with disabilities in Canada, especially for those persons with severe and very severe types of disabilities.

Significant numbers of Canadians with disabilities indicated that they were completely prevented from using public transportation services for local travel (including buses, specialized buses, subways and taxis) and many of those who were able to make use of such services, did so with difficulty. Difficulty with transportation increases significantly with the severity of disability. Similar findings were obtained for local transportation by car as well as for long distance travel by car and long distance travel by airplane, train or bus. See Table 2 in Appendix A for more detailed information on the transportation difficulties of persons with disabilities.

Education

Educational Attainment by Disability Status and Gender
Persons Aged 25-54, Nova Scotia, 2001

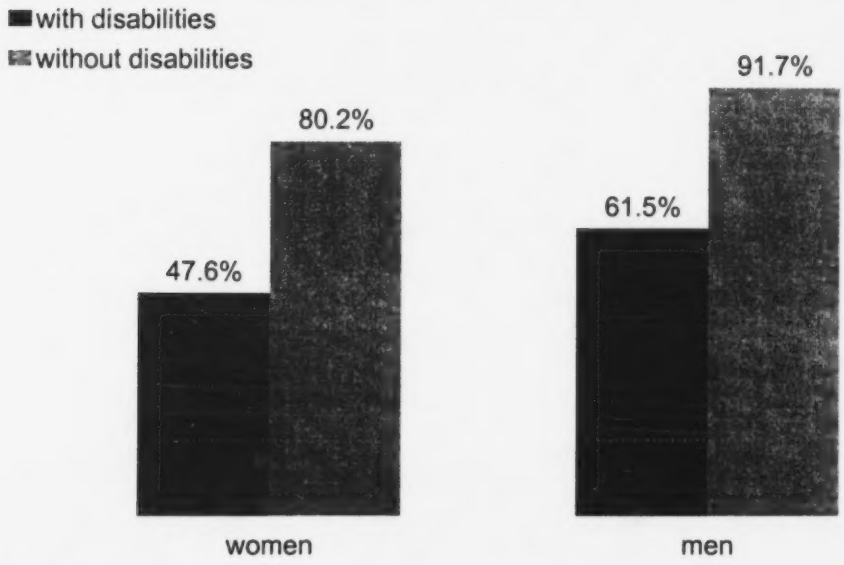


Source: Statistics Canada: Catalogue No. 89-587-XIE.

Working-age women and men with disabilities are educationally disadvantaged in comparison to working-age women and men without disabilities. In the 25-54 year age group, 31% of women with disabilities in Nova Scotia have less than high school levels of education compared to 20% of women without disabilities. Similarly, 36% of men with disabilities have not completed high school compared to 24% of men without disabilities. Women and men with disabilities are also much less likely to have university degrees than those without disabilities. Proportionally, women with disabilities are only about half as likely to have university levels of education than are women without disabilities (13% versus 25%) while men with disabilities are only about one-third as likely to have university levels of education as are men without disabilities (6% versus 19%). On the other hand, women with disabilities are twice as likely as men with disabilities to have a university education, at 13% versus 6%, respectively. For more detailed information about educational attainment see Table 3 in Appendix A.

Labour Force

Labour Force Participation by Disability Status and Gender
Persons Aged 25-54, Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-587-XIE

Women and men with disabilities in Nova Scotia are much less likely to be in the paid labour force as compared to women and men without disabilities[7].

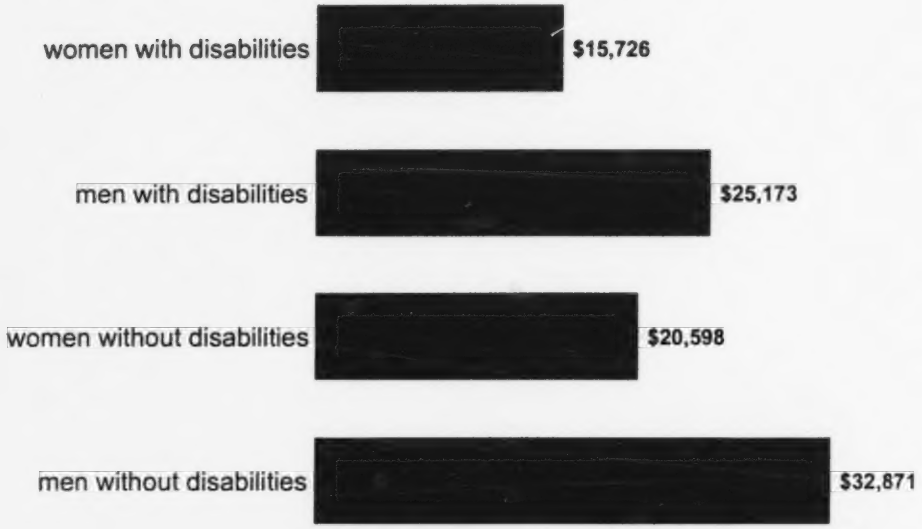
Less than half (47.6%) of women with disabilities who are in their prime working years (25-54 years) are in the labour force compared to 80.2% of women without disabilities. The differences in labour force participation between men with and without disabilities is also significant. While more than 90% of men without disabilities are in the paid labour force, the rate for men with disabilities is 61.5%.

Some regional variation in the labour force participation rates of women and men with disabilities is also evident. In the Cape Breton region, only 18% of disabled women (aged 15-64) are in the paid labour force, compared to 33% of women in the Halifax region. See Table 4 in Appendix A for greater detail.

Once in the paid labour force, women and men with disabilities have employment and unemployment rates that are quite similar to those of women and men without disabilities. Men with and without disabilities had almost identical unemployment rates in 2001 at 10.6% and 10.9%, respectively. In 2001, the unemployment rate of women with disabilities was 11.7%, slightly higher than that of women without disabilities at 8.8%. See Table 5 in Appendix A for regional variations in unemployment rates.

Income and Poverty

Average Income by Disability Status and Gender
Persons aged 15-64 years -- Nova Scotia, 2001

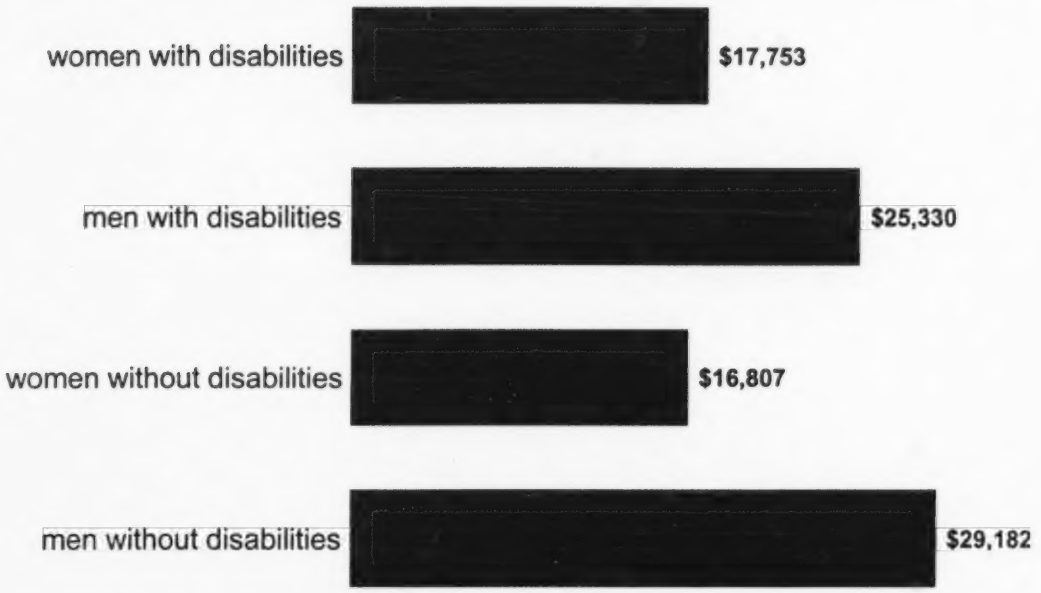


Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-587-XIE

Given the low labour force participation rates of women and men with disabilities in Nova Scotia, it is not surprising that their incomes are also considerably lower. In 2001, working-age women with disabilities had an average income of only $15,726 compared to $20,871 for women without disabilities. The average income of working-age men with disabilities in Nova Scotia was $25,173 in 2001. This is close to $7,700 less than the average income of men without disabilities but close to $10,000 more than the average income of women with disabilities.

The median income of women with disabilities in 2001 was $10,421 while for women without disabilities it was $16,312. The median income of men with disabilities in 2001 was $20,610 while for men without disabilities it was $27,588.

Average Income by Disability Status and Gender
Persons aged 65 and over -- Nova Scotia, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-587-XIE

There is substantially less of a difference in the average incomes of senior women (and men) with and without disabilities than there is in the incomes of the working-age population.

Women with disabilities who are aged 65 and over have average incomes that are about $950 greater per year than those of senior women without disabilities. Senior men without disabilities, on the other hand, have average incomes that are about $3,850 greater per year than senior men with disabilities. The income differences are much greater when making comparisons between the sexes.

The median income of senior women with disabilities in 2001 was $13,618 while for senior women without disabilities it was $13,003. The median income of senior men with disabilities in 2001 was $18,212 while for senior men without disabilities it was $19,525.

Food Insecurity

National-level statistics indicate that women and men with disabilities are more likely to experience food insecurity and that food insecurity is more severe for younger people.[8]

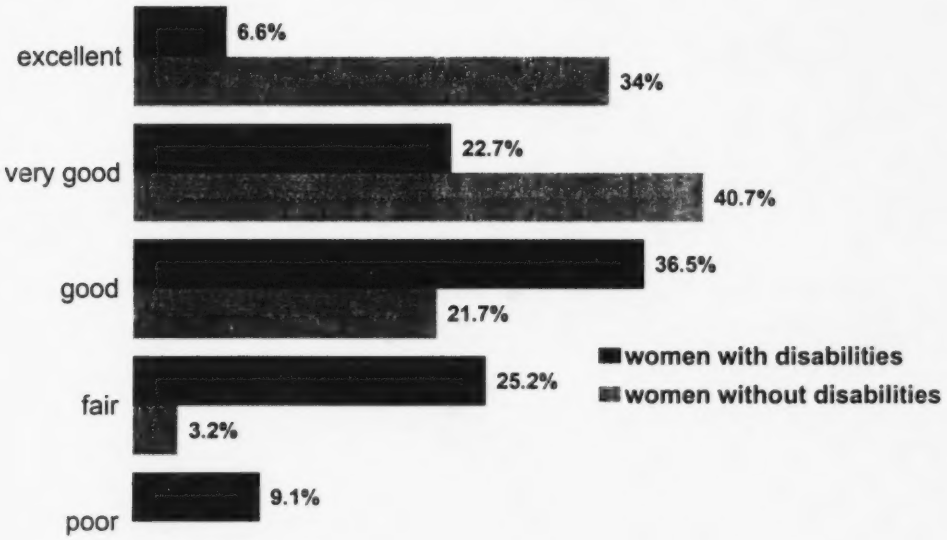
Food Insecurity among Persons with and without Disabilities by Age and Gender, Canada, 1998/99

	15-34 yrs	35-49 yrs	50-64 yrs	65 yrs +
Women with disabilities	24.4%	24.1%	19.5%	7.0%
Men with disabilities	25.0%	20.3%	14.3%	6.4%
Women without disabilities	12.0%	8.9%	4.9%	2.5%
Men without disabilities	10.6%	7.7%	4.1%	2.4%

Source: CCSD Disability Information Sheet No. 10, 2003

The table above clearly illustrates that persons with disabilities, across their lifespan, are more vulnerable to food insecurity than persons without disabilities. This is especially the case for women with disabilities.

Self-Rated Health Status of Women with and without Disabilities – Canada, 1998/99



Source: Canadian Council on Social Development, Disability Information Sheet #9, 2003

Canadian women with and without disabilities rate their own health very differently. While three-quarters (75%) of women without disabilities rate their health as either excellent or very good, only 29% of women with disabilities do so.

Thirty-four percent of women with disabilities, on the other hand, rate their health as fair or poor compared to only 3% of women without disabilities.

Medication Use and Cost

Eighty-four percent of Nova Scotian women with disabilities who are under the age of 65 use medication on a regular basis compared to 73.8% of men with disabilities. Among disabled women aged 65 and over, 96% are using medication regularly. Both age and severity of disability increase the likelihood that a person with a disability takes medication. Women are more likely to use medication regularly than men and they are also more likely to report being unable to get medication because of cost. Twenty percent of women with moderate disabilities and 25% of women with severe and very severe disabilities report not being to get medication due to cost, compared to 9.5% and 18.1% of men with comparable

disabilities[9].

Many factors contribute to a person's health and sense of well-being. These non-medical or social determinants of health include such things as income, employment status, level of education, sense of personal security and level of social support, among many others. As we have seen above, women and men with disabilities are disadvantaged with respect to education, labour force participation and income.

Personal Security

Women with disabilities feel more vulnerable with respect to their personal safety and security. Canadian women with disabilities are almost twice as likely as women without disabilities (27% versus 14%) to report that they stay home at night because they are afraid to go out alone. Thirty percent of women with disabilities (compared to 12% of women without disabilities and 9% of men with disabilities) report that they do not walk or wheel alone after dark in their neighbourhood[9].

Research indicates that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and abuse than women without disabilities. Research shows that rates of sexual and physical abuse among women with disabilities are high, that women with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse at the hands of a greater number of perpetrators and for longer periods, and that women with disabilities experience some types of abuse that are specifically related to their disabilities. Significant risk factors for violence and abuse include poverty and one's level of dependence on others[10].

Social Support

National-level studies also indicate that persons with disabilities are more likely to rate their levels of support in a variety of areas as being quite low. Women with disabilities indicate they have lower levels of social support than either women without disabilities or men with disabilities. Persons with disabilities also rate their levels of emotional/informational support and affection as being lower than that of persons without disabilities[11].

Having a job is an important contributor to most people's sense of well-being but, interestingly, employment appears to have an even greater impact on the well-being of women and men with disabilities than it does for those without disabilities. For example, one study showed that persons with disabilities who had worked in the past 12 months, rated their level of emotional/informational support as being substantially higher than persons with disabilities who had not worked in the 12 months preceding the survey. While the same relation holds

true for persons without disabilities, the differences are not as great[11].

While it is difficult to determine whether having a job leads to increased support or vice versa, it is clear that employment is vitally important to the social and economic well-being of persons with disabilities. Given the extremely low levels of labour force participation among women with disabilities in this province, it is imperative that government policies and programs be developed to facilitate their transition to employment, and that any economic development strategy aimed at persons with disabilities take the crucial role of gender into account.

Notes

1 The 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) is a follow-up survey to the 2001 Census which uses census data to collect information on a sample of children and adults who identified themselves as having a disability. Respondents' answers to the disability questions represent their perception of their limitation and are therefore subjective. Data from PALS is not available at the sub-provincial level. PALS defines persons with disabilities as those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical, mental condition, or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do. (Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 89-580-XIE)

2 According to the 2001 Census, 24% or 177,955 Nova Scotian adults had a disability in 2001. This estimate is somewhat higher than the prevalence of 17.1% established by PALS and, unlike PALS, the 2001 Census allows for sub-provincial comparisons. Table 1 in Appendix A shows the differences in the prevalence of disability among women and men in four regions of Nova Scotia: **Halifax** (includes Halifax County and part of Hants County); **Northern** (includes Antigonish, Colchester, Cumberland, Guysborough, and Pictou counties); **South Shore Valley** (includes Hants, Kings, Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens, and Lunenburg counties); and **Cape Breton** (includes Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond and Victoria counties). See Table 1 in Appendix A for a regional break-down of disability rates.

3 The PALS measured the severity of disability by constructing an index based on the survey questions. Points were given according to the intensity and frequency of the activity limitations reported by the respondent. A single score was computed for each type of disability reported. Each score was then standardized in order to have a value between 0 and 1. The final score is the average of the scores for each type of disability reported by the respondent. The severity of overall disability, therefore, depends on both the severity of each type of disability and the number of disabilities that an individual has. For adults (15 years and over), severity is divided into four groups, mild, moderate, severe, and very severe.

4 Assistive aids and devices include all specialized aids, devices, or services that enable persons with disabilities to carry out their everyday activities, such as by making it easier for them to get around (wheelchair, hand or arm support) or by helping them to hear, see or speak (hearing aids, Braille reading materials, keyboard device for communicating). (Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 89-580-XIE)

5 Refers to whether or not the person is receiving help in completing the following types of everyday activities:
- meal preparation
- everyday housework (dusting, tidying up)
- heavy household chores
- transportation (grocery shopping, getting to and from appointments)
- personal financing (banking, bills)
- child care
- personal care
- moving around within the home (Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 89-580-XIE)

6 Special features in the home include all specialized features within the residence such as handrails, visual alarms, or audio warning devices and adapted bathrooms, as well as modifications that enable the person to enter or leave the dwelling (such as a ramp). (Stats Can, Cat. No. 89-580-XIE)

7 The labour force includes persons that are employed as well as persons that are unemployed (but looking for work).

8 Food insecurity includes going without food, eating less than required, and/or worrying about not being able to buy food due to a lack of money. (CCSD Disability Information Sheet No. 10, 2003)

9 Source: CCSD Disability Information sheet No. 11, 2003, Canadian Council on Social Development.

10 Public Health Agency of Canada, Family Violence Prevention Unit, *Violence Against Women with Disabilities Overview Paper*. Available from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence at:
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/femabus_e.html

11 Source: CCSD Disability Information sheet No. 9, 2003 defines the following:

Social support: An index based on the reported availability of: someone to help if you were confined to bed; someone to help take you to a doctor; someone to help prepare meals if you were unable to do so; someone to help with daily chores if you were sick.

Emotional or informational support: An index based on the reported availability of someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk; someone to give you advice about a crisis; someone to give you information to help you understand a situation; someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems; someone whose advice you really want; someone to share your most private worries and fears with; someone to turn to for suggestions about how to deal with a personal problem; someone who understands your problems.

Affection: An index based on the reported availability of: someone who shows you love and affection; someone who hugs you; and someone who makes you feel wanted.

Appendix A

Table 1.

Prevalence of Disability by Gender
Nova Scotia and Regions, 2001

	Nova Scotia	Halifax	Northern	South Shore Valley	Cape Breton
% Women with disabilities	25%	22%	26%	27%	28%
% Men with disabilities	24%	19%	25%	26%	28%

Source: 2001 Census, Service Canada, Labour Market Information Profiles on Persons with Disabilities, Nova Scotia Region, 2004

Table 2.

Prevalence of Difficulty with Transportation for Persons with Disabilities
Canada, 2001

	Mild Disability	Very Severe Disability
Completely prevented from using public transportation (eg., buses, specialized buses, taxis, subways) for local travel	2%	11%
Able to use public transportation (eg., buses, specialized buses, taxis, subways) for local travel but with difficulty	6%	35%
Completely prevented from traveling locally by car	2%	6%
Able to travel locally by car but with difficulty	6%	48%
Able to travel long distance by car but with difficulty	32%*	64%
Completely prevented from traveling long distance by airplane, train, or bus	8%*	21%
Able to travel long distance by airplane, train, or bus but with difficulty	8%	43%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 PALS, Catalogue No. 89-580-XIE

* This is the rate for all persons with disability, not only for those with a mild disability.

Table 3.

Educational Attainment by Disability Status and Gender
Persons Aged 25-54, Nova Scotia, 2001

	Women		Men	
Education level	With Disability	Without Disability	With Disability	Without Disability
less than high school	31%	20%	36%	24%
high school	23%	20%	22%	18%
trades	13%	13%	24%	22%
college	19%	23%	12%	16%
university	13%	25%	6%	19%

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 89-579.

Table 4.

Labour Force Participation Rates by Disability Status and Gender
Persons Aged 15-64, Nova Scotia by Region, 2001

	Halifax		Cape Breton		South Shore Valley		Northern	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
With disability	33%	43%	18%	26%	24%	37%	25%	36%
Without disability	63%	74%	48%	57%	52%	67%	53%	67%

Source: 2001 Census, Service Canada, Labour Market Information Profiles on Persons with Disabilities, Nova Scotia Region, 2004

Table 5.

Unemployment Rates for Women and Men with Disabilities by Region Persons Aged 15-64, Nova Scotia, 2001

	Nova Scotia	Halifax	Cape Breton	South Shore Valley	Northern
Women with Disabilities	13%	10%	19%	14%	15%
Men with Disabilities	13%	10%	24%	12%	16%

Source: 2001 Census, Service Canada, Labour Market Information Profiles on Persons with Disabilities, Nova Scotia Region, 2004